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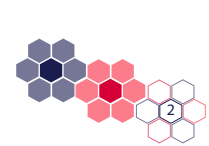Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

Public policy and the infrastructure of kindness in Scotland

Simon Anderson and Julie Brownlie

September 2019

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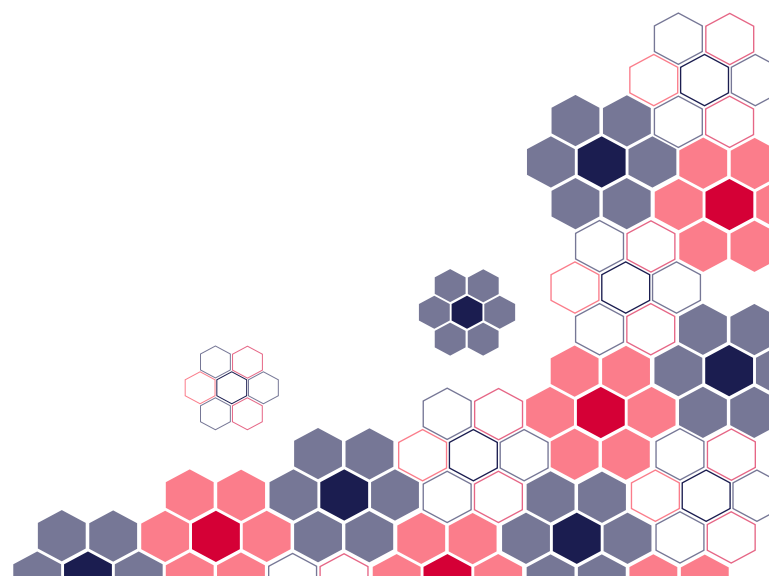
Preface

There has been a great deal of talk lately about kindness in popular culture and – in Scotland in particular – in relation to public policy. But, although kindness has many possible definitions, its meaning is taken for granted in much of this discussion. In other words, and like some other key policy terms (such as wellbeing or community or democracy), kindness is at risk of becoming a 'clean concept' (Ahmed, 2014), one which is hard to disagree with and which short-circuits debate. The fact that there is now a reference to kindness in the National Performance Framework (NPF)[1], Scotland's vision for national wellbeing, is at face value easy to welcome and its symbolic value seems clear enough, signalling that Scotland places people and relationships at the heart of its conception of the good society. But what do we actually mean when we talk about a kinder Scotland? Is kindness really a concept that belongs in, or has much to say to, the realm of public policy? What are its risks and ambivalences? And, equally importantly, how exactly might public policy help to enable or sustain an 'infrastructure of kindness'?

If we want to answer those questions – and to move beyond the warm words of the NPF into the realm of the practical and even the transformational – there is a need for elaboration, explanation and debate. This document is intended as a contribution to that process. As such, it sits alongside the work of others who have been engaging with ideas and actions relating to kindness. In some respects, it seeks to take that conversation back a few steps – to return to questions of definition and understanding. Ultimately, however, it aims to move things forward by engaging with the critical question of what the state and other organisational actors might start to do, stop doing or do differently in pursuit of a kinder Scotland.

Simon Anderson and Julie Brownlie
September 2019

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1   https://nationalperformance.gov.scot

1. Introduction

An unusual conversation has been taking place within policy and research circles in Scotland in recent years: one focused on the idea of kindness. That conversation has both informed and been further stimulated by one specific development – the inclusion of a reference to kindness at the heart of the refreshed National Performance Framework for Scotland, alongside other values including compassion and dignity (see Figure 1).

This report asks the question: what would it mean to take seriously the commitment to kindness within the NPF? More specifically, it considers how and why kindness has emerged as a focus for public policy in Scotland; what is actually meant by the term and what might distinguish it from related concepts; and how government and organisations might operationalise it within the context of policy and practice.

The report has roots in a number of related initiatives. Its origins lie partly in a research project that we undertook between 2013 and 2015 for the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF) (Anderson, Brownlie and Milne, 2015a, 2015b; Brownlie and Anderson, 2016; Brownlie and Spandler, 2018; Brownlie, 2019). The Liveable Lives study set out to identify, document and understand, in three

communities in and around Glasgow, what might be termed 'everyday kindness' – in other words, the small acts and relationships of help and support that occur between people who are not necessarily linked by familial or professional duty or obligation. This research showed, while such interactions may not be spectacular – indeed, they are often barely noticed – they are deeply significant, socially embedded and emotionally complex.

The research for JRF provided the stimulus for an extensive and influential programme of work taken forward by the Carnegie UK Trust. This had a number of strands: initial work by Zoe Ferguson to examine the relevance and applicability of kindness within community settings (Ferguson, 2016, 2017); a thinkpiece by Julia Unwin on the relationship between kindness, emotions and public policy (Unwin, 2018); and the establishment of the Kindness Innovation Network (KIN), which brought together a large number of individuals and organisations from across Scotland to develop and test ideas about how to embed kindness in workplaces, services and communities. Zoe Ferguson and Ben Thurman also took forward a programme of work with one specific organisation, North Ayrshire Council (Ferguson and Thurman, 2019).

Some of the conceptual and practical issues emerging from these various developments were examined further in the Kindness Sessions[2] – an informal seminar series, funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), which we ran at the University of Edinburgh between October 2018 and January 2019. This brought together representatives from a range of public, private and third sector settings to share organisational perspectives and experiences and to consider what it would mean to take seriously kindness as a focus, objective or value in the context of public policy in Scotland. Following the Kindness Sessions, we were also involved in a series of

Figure 1

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discussions with Scottish Government staff working in the areas of public service reform and the NPF.

This report distils some of the key themes from the Kindness Sessions but also builds on the wider developments outlined above and connects them explicitly to the NPF. As such, we hope that it complements, rather than duplicates, other contributions to these debates. Our own background is in sociology, particularly the sociology of emotions and relationships, rather than policy. We believe a sociological approach has much to offer a discussion of kindness and public policy but we have also, as much as possible, sought to engage with a range of wider academic literatures. With the general reader in mind, however, these are signposted rather than reviewed systematically.

Kindness as a value and a practice

We are making the case for a particular understanding of kindness here – one that treats it not just as a somewhat intangible value (as it appears in the NPF), or an individual character trait or virtue, but as something that is also concrete, consisting of **the things that people do for one another (both practically and emotionally) in response to moments of perceived need, when there is the option to do nothing.**

Examples might involve a child looked after, a lift given, an ear lent or a rule bent. Such moments may not be 'grand'. They might lack the apparent weight or solemnity of concepts like compassion, solidarity or community, but they can be hugely significant, both for individuals and communities. And while these small acts undoubtedly involve questions of values and morality, ultimately, kindness is about social practices and the conditions under which these are more, or less, likely to occur. By drawing attention to and encouraging these practices, we are promoting kindness as a value. But we are also emphasising the *value of kindness* – in other words, the

concrete difference that such practices make to economic and social life.

That leads us to the idea of an **'infrastructure of kindness'** – a phrase, borrowed from Thrift (2005) and Hall and Smith (2015), that we have used elsewhere and build on here. Like the roads we walk on and the electricity we use, small acts of help, support and recognition are fundamental: they make possible other things. And rather than just being what happens within social networks or relationships, these acts are those relationships in the sense that they help to create, maintain and strengthen them. Others have written about the way that material infrastructures (such as buildings and parks) shape the relational and vice versa (Klinenberg, 2018; Star, 2002) but what is important to grasp here is that relationships themselves have infrastructural qualities.

While the infrastructure of kindness has a taken-for-granted, background quality, like other infrastructures, it needs to be sustained and maintained. The question of how public policy might contribute to that process – but also be informed by and benefit from it – is a core theme of this report.

A note on public policy

In what follows, we are implicitly critical of the tendency to use the term kindness without seeking to define or operationalise it. Given that, it would be remiss not to say what we mean by the other concept in the title of this report – 'public policy'. Despite our start point with the Scottish Government and the National Performance Framework, we do not mean to limit our understanding of (public) policy to a narrow set of activities associated with central government, politicians and civil servants. Instead, like Cairney (2012, p.5), we start with an understanding of it as encompassing 'the sum total of government action, from signals of intent to the final outcomes' and recognise that it may involve actors outside government itself and that 'policymaking' is a continual process
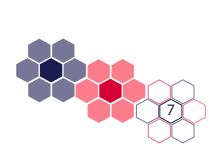
rather than an event. Public policy, as discussed here, also involves practice – not just in the sense of how policies are delivered, on the ground, by practitioners and service providers, but in the sense that it is a practice or body of practical knowledge (Gill, Singleton and Waterton, 2017). It is worth explaining, too, that we use the term 'public policy' rather than 'social policy' to signal that this is a debate that has relevance beyond those areas associated, at least traditionally, with the realm of social welfare – for example, in fields as diverse as the environment, transport or defence. That is not to say that kindness is a concept that can or should be operationalised in uniform ways across all these policy terrains, given the multiplicity of projects and policies that the state entails. However, given the risk that policymaking becomes more compartmentalised in the face of complex social challenges from social justice to climate change, there are calls to be clearer about the overarching aims of the public sector including normative ones (Kattel and Mazzucato, 2018). Kindness and the other values at the heart of the NPF (such as dignity and compassion) are examples of these.
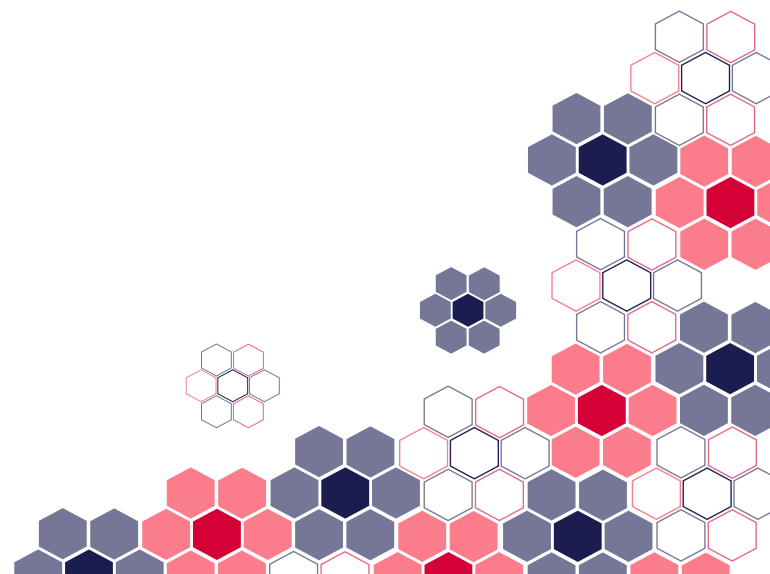
2. Why now and why here?

Why has kindness emerged as a focus for discussion about public policy in the last couple of years? And why has that discussion taken root especially strongly in Scotland?

The cultural trope of 'random acts of kindness' has been around for several decades, spawning bumper stickers, 'kindness days' and charity campaigns.[3] But recent years have seen an especially sustained interest in the UK in kindness within popular culture, politics and the broader media. This may partly be a reaction to what journalists Polly Toynbee and David Walker (2015) have called 'a harder, meaner Britain' with its backdrop of austerity and growing anti-immigrant sentiment. The language of kindness has certainly begun to appear more frequently in the political realm. In the face of increasing polarisation and aggression in public and political debate, for example, there have been calls for a 'kinder, gentler politics' from Jeremy Corbyn and others (WebRoots Democracy, 2018).[4]

Kindness has also been positioned as a potential 'cure' for the 'epidemic' of loneliness and social isolation (Reeves, 2017); and there is growing interest in how it might contribute to the wellbeing of those performing 'kind acts' as well as those receiving them. This latter theme is evident both within the self-help literature (see, for example, Brahm, 2016; Cousineau, 2018) and within academic research (see Otake et al., 2006; Buchanan and Bardi 2010; Cotney and Banerjee, 2019). Confirmation that kindness might not only be 'having a moment' but is already prompting a backlash came in 2018, when Eva Wiseman warned in the Guardian about the 'cult of being kind' and suggested that it is replacing mindfulness as the buzzword for how we should live (Wiseman, 2018).

While relationships have always been the focus or object of policy-making, in recent years they have been identified as having a more active role. The influential idea of an ethic of care (Tronto, 1994) is relevant here – an approach to personal, social, moral, and political life that starts from the reality that all human beings need and receive care and give care to others. But the appearance of kindness in discussions about policy can also be seen as consistent with a growing critique of the transactionalism of New Public Management, and an explicit 'relational turn' in thinking about the role of the state (and specifically the welfare state). Such discussion has often taken as a start point the general crisis of care rooted in the limits of the welfare state in the face of an ageing population. But it also reflects specific failures of care, such as those in mid-Staffordshire or in the residential care system, which have highlighted absences of (as the Francis Report put it) 'basic kindnesses' (Francis, 2013). These themes can be seen in various reports and books that have looked at the state's role in relationships and vice versa (see, for example, Cook and Muir, 2012; Wallace, 2013; Hilton, Bade and Bade, 2015; Unwin, 2018; Cottam, 2018).

As well as the question of 'why now?' we should also consider the question of 'why here?'. In other words, why is it that kindness now sits at the centre of debates about public policy in Scotland in a way that it does not elsewhere in the UK. Some might want to argue that Scotland is a particularly kind society or nation – unusually attuned, through its history and culture, to issues of suffering and the needs of others (see, for example, Fevre, 2019). There certainly are currents in Scottish culture and history which resonate with notions of kindness, including the concept of fellow feeling (Hearn, 2016), but Scotland has of course seen[5] – and continues to see – its share of poverty, racism and other forms of injustice (see, for example, Davidson et al., 2018).

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3   The phrase 'random acts of kindness' was allegedly coined in 1982 by the American writer, Anne Herbert, as a deliberate echo of – and counter to – 'random acts of violence'.

4   There has, of course, also been a renewed focus on the related notion of 'compassion in politics'. See, for example, Dubs (2018)

5   For example, Scotland, its cities and institutions profited greatly from the Atlantic slave trade – an issue recently highlighted by Glasgow University's decision to pay £20m in reparations –https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2019/aug/23/glasgow-university-slave-trade-reparations.
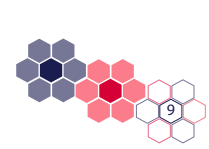
Nevertheless, the *narrative* of Scotland as a kind nation has a particular 'oppositional' power in the context of a nationalist administration in Edinburgh and a Westminster government associated with policies such as the 'bedroom tax', Universal Credit and the hostile environment policy. And it is a concept which potentially fits well with many of the other features of the 'Scottish approach' to policymaking (Christie, 2011; Housden, 2014), including the emphasis on asset-based working, community empowerment, co-production and prevention and the principle that service design should be collaborative, inclusive and empathic.[6]

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6   See https://resources.mygov.scot/37f87d5/designing-public-services-in-scotland/why-we-need-design-for-public-services-in-scotland/design-principles/
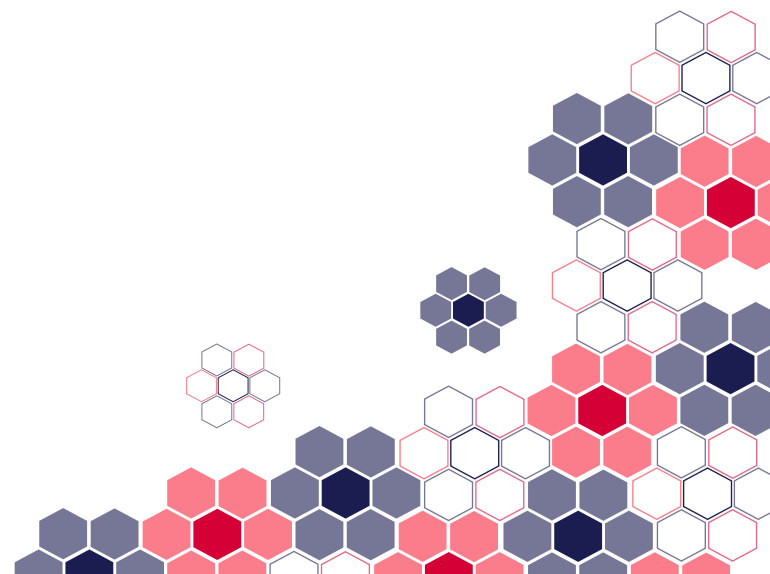
3. What do we mean by kindness and what might it offer that other concepts do not?

One of the attractions of the concept of kindness is that it has an intuitive, lay quality. Most people would say that they know what is meant by kindness, that they recognise it when they see it and that they feel its absence keenly. But that sense of familiarity with the term perhaps also means that it is more commonly deployed than defined, and the attempt to pin down what people – or organisations – actually mean by it can produce vague, varying and sometimes contradictory positions, and also anxiety about disappearing down conceptual 'rabbit holes'.

We argue though that it is important to persist with the question of what, if anything, might be potentially distinctive about the idea of kindness. Especially in the context of the NPF, where it is invoked alongside other values, such as compassion and dignity, we need to ask what kindness might offer that other concepts do not, and what version of kindness – because there are many – we are trying to invoke. A clearer answer to those questions would, we think, help those efforts – by the Scottish Government, the Carnegie UK Trust through its work on KIN (Ferguson and Thurman, 2019) and others – to understand what the *value* commitment at the heart of the NPF might actually look like in *practice*.

We suggest that a conscious and careful use of the term might also help to mitigate the risk that kindness-related initiatives are seen either as examples of 'motherhood and apple pie' (impossible to disagree with but lacking in substance) or cynical attempts to manipulate communities and individuals into taking on roles and tasks that should really be the responsibility of the state or other collective actors. While such risks cannot be mitigated entirely, we believe that it is possible to articulate a meaningful, practical and potentially radical version of kindness that

distinguishes it from the nice-to-be-nice rhetoric of 'random acts' and from much of the wider discussion surrounding kindness and public policy. Within the latter, the term is often used as a shorthand for the general importance of emotions and relationships (see, for example, Unwin, 2018), or interchangeably with related concepts, such as compassion, care, altruism and so on – but the implications for public policy of these implicit understandings are generally not identified.

Drawing on the research that we conducted for the Joseph Rowntree Foundation in Glasgow (Anderson, Brownlie and Milne, 2015a, 2015b), we have tried to articulate an understanding of kindness that is narrower and has a number of core features (Brownlie and Anderson, 2016; Anderson and Brownlie, 2018). (We use the term 'an understanding of kindness' here in recognition that it is not the only possible one.)

Unlike its closest neighbour – the idea of compassion, with its connotations of, and etymological roots in, suffering – **kindness is not 'grand' and is embedded in the small-scale, the mundane and the everyday**. As such, it does not necessarily involve an emotional connection with explicit suffering and pain (for instance, of the dying or the bereaved).[7] And yet these low-level and often barely visible acts and relationships of ordinary help and support are extraordinarily important. Indeed, such micro-interactions have enormous significance for almost all of us, helping to make life 'liveable', both practically and emotionally.

In fact, as we have argued elsewhere (Brownlie and Anderson, 2016; Anderson and Brownlie, 2018), **kindness has an infrastructural quality.** Small acts and relationships of everyday kindness are fundamental: they make possible other things. Such interactions can help parents to remain in employment, or older people with

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7   We are not arguing here that those who are involved in compassion work (such as the remarkable Compassionate Inverclyde) see their work as 'grand' or only involving suffering, but rather that the word itself can carry this connotation and, as such, be potentially off-putting to those on the 'receiving end'.

disabilities to remain in the community. They can support convalescence on release from hospital or reintegration on release from prison. And they can build relationships and networks of trust that become a priceless community resource. But like other infrastructures that operate in the background of our lives, the infrastructure of kindness needs to be sustained and maintained.

Kindness has a highly contingent quality. It grows out of (and merges into) other things: quick chats over the garden fence, chance meetings on the stair or in the street, moments of informality in otherwise scripted encounters, and familiarity (though not necessarily deep connection) through shared interests and activities. Out of these sometimes fleeting and often mundane interactions, more significant acts and relationships of kindness may arise, *but they may not*. Through attending to these background conditions, we can render kindness more likely but we cannot force it into existence.

The reason for this is that **kindness is essentially unobligated**: indeed, it is this characteristic that helps us to recognise kindness as such in the first place and gives it emotional charge. We see it at those moments when people act in ways that they are not obliged or required to (as a result of professional or familial duty, expectations of direct reciprocity and so on). As soon as an act or relationship is expected, demanded or mandated, it tips into something else – into obligation, duty, care, and so on. And indeed, once kindness has been shown, it may well lead to different kinds of ties (the idea that one kind turn deserves another).

This means that **kindness cannot be universally distributed, expected or demanded** which again distinguishes it from other important relational concepts, such as dignity, respect and compassion, with which it sits at the heart of the NPF.[8]

To the extent that it cannot be mandated or standardised, kindness is not dissimilar to love. Unlike love, however, kindness does not have connotations of strong feelings of attachment towards a small number of known others but is rather associated with a more diffuse practice towards acquaintances and strangers – though an understanding of love in this broader potentially radical sense has been of academic interest for some time (hooks, 2000) and is now gaining traction in policy and political circles, including in Scotland.[9]

While kindness may be mundane, these apparently small acts and relationships often involve and produce **complex emotions** and as a result are inherently **risky**. The risks of everyday kindness are then largely 'affective', relating to how others may see us or how we see ourselves. In navigating relationships of low-level help and support, we have to manage considerable anxieties about appearing weak, 'overstepping the mark', creating ongoing expectations or dependencies, being seen as a 'taker' on the one hand or a martyr on the other, and so on. In the context of organisations and professional-client relationships, however, there may be other risks too – involving, for example, questions of safety, liability, fairness or justice.

Kindness has a **strongly subjective dimension** in that its definition is largely in the eye of the beholder (or recipient): we cannot claim kindness for ourselves – it can only be ascribed to us via the perception of others. This again differentiates kindness from mainstream understandings of compassion, which have tended to prioritise the experience of those who witness suffering – hence the longstanding body of work critical of compassion as growing out of privilege and reaffirming hierarchies and inequalities (Spelman, 2001).

The etymological roots of the word kindness are in kin. However fleetingly, then, 'kinned-ness'

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8   This feature of kindness – though often overlooked – was identified in the eighteenth century by Adam Smith (1982, p.80) who, in The Theory of Moral Sentiments wrote: 'Even the most ordinary degree of kindness or beneficence […] cannot, among equals, be extorted by force'.

9   See, for example, the work of the Independent Care review in this area - https://www.carereview.scot/blog-care-review-care-about-love/

turns 'others' into kin (or 'kin-like'). As such, **it is a potentially radical and disruptive concept.** But it is important to remember that decisions about whose needs we recognise and respond to can serve to exclude as well as include, and that there are versions and narratives of kindness that are more insular in nature – emphasising, for example, 'small-town' or neighbourhood values and community self-reliance (an issue we return to in Section 8). This reminds us that the reference in the National Performance Framework to treating 'all our people' with kindness has potential limits around it. Who exactly are 'our people' and how far are we willing, individually and collectively, to expand the boundaries of those we are willing to treat in kin-like ways? Does the version of kindness suggested by the NPF automatically include refugees and asylum seekers, prisoners and the most marginalised? Does treating people in 'kin-like' ways mean people have to be like us? How can we hold on to difference in the context of kindness?

Overall, despite the cultural trope of randomness and the tendency to view kindness as a matter of individual choice, psychology or morality, **kindness is deeply social** and needs to be treated as such. Our capacity to help and be helped in small-scale, unobligated ways is enabled and constrained by social infrastructures – that is, by the places, spaces and communities we live in, by our life stage and biographies and by our social networks, relationships and other resources. Rather than make appeals to individual conscience, it is these domains we need to acknowledge, or shape, through public policy if we want to see a kinder Scotland.

In summary, we suggest that **kindness involves small-scale and sometimes barely visible practices of recognition, help and support, in which individuals – even if they are acting within organisational contexts – respond to the needs of others in ways that are essentially unobligated, often emotionally complex and always deeply social.**

On the relationship between kindness and emotions

The above makes clear that kindness and emotions are closely connected but it is important to be explicit about what the nature of this connection is. While emotions have been central to the emerging debates about kindness in public policy, they have tended to figure in particular ways. Specifically, emotions have been talked about in the context of how we react to kindness (for instance, anxiety or fear about how kindness might be perceived in a work environment – Ferguson and Thurman, 2019), in terms of a need to equip people with 'emotional intelligence', and as a specific kind of policy language, distinct from rational language:

> *There are two lexicons in use in public policy. There is the language of metrics, and value added, of growth and resource allocation, of regulation, and of impact. And there is the language of kindness and grief, of loneliness, love and friendship, of the ties that bind, our sense of identity and of belonging. (Unwin, 2018, p,9)*

These are important contributions but they also highlight the consequences (often unintended) of such talk. First, although different framings or lexicons exist in public policy, it is important that in describing these lexicons we do not inadvertently stereotype emotions as inherently unstable, the opposite of 'a cool measured and data driven approach to public policy' (Unwin, 2018, p.8). In fact, emotions have always been present, if implicitly, in public policy within the so called 'rational' lexicon – often in discussions about the need for different kinds of research evidence and as an important kind of knowledge in its own right. In other words, in calling for emotions to play a greater part in policymaking, it is important not to overplay the dualism between emotions and rationality. This is consistent with a growing body of research that understands emotional knowledge and emotions to be a core part of professionalism, even in the most
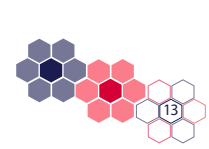
'objective' or 'rational' of spaces such as the judiciary (Bergman Blix and Wettergren, 2016; Fineman, 2008).

There is also a risk in discussions about kindness that it, and the emotions involved, come to be thought of in highly individualised ways, as rooted in 'the kind of people we are'. Emotions, however, are deeply social: they are formed through, and shaped by, relationships and social context. This is why apparently simple acts can be underpinned by, and result in, complex and significant emotions. To put this in everyday terms, we need to understand more about *why* an 80 year-old widower living in a rapidly changing community in central Glasgow, and in the context of an increasingly dependency-stigmatising society, may find it difficult to give or receive kindness; and to develop policy in turn that addresses this social complexity. In other words, we need to understand that we do not all experience emotions, including those linked to kindness, in the same way. Trust, for instance, is shaped by inequalities and those with less power – with poorer health and fewer resources – are more likely to find their bases for trust eroded and to feel, in turn, more vulnerable.
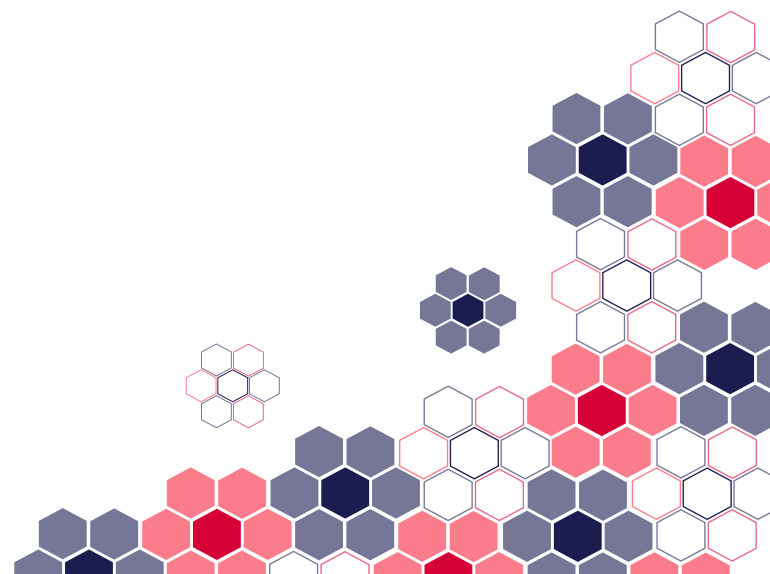
4. Some general implications for policy and practice

The above discussion hints at implications for the Scottish Government and other organisational actors in trying to make a reality of the value commitment at the heart of the NPF. In this section, we make some of those implications more explicit; and, in subsequent sections, show what they might mean for actual policies and practices.

- The unobligated and interpersonal character of kindness limits the extent to which governments and organisations can 'do' kindness directly. In short, such actors cannot force kindness into existence: but they can create, sustain or avoid damaging the conditions in which kindness is likely to occur. However, because the relationship between policymaking and kindness is indirect, there is a danger that it is overlooked entirely when organisations are operating at the level of planning, procurement, budgeting and so on.

- At the same time, because it involves this element of relational discretion, kindness is less capable of being monitored, harnessed and controlled than other aspects of organisational life. That means it may often feel risky and uncomfortable, both for management and staff, when attention is drawn to it.

- Generalised exhortations to 'be kind', or campaigns designed to encourage random acts of kindness, are inevitably limited in their effect because they ignore the social context, emotional complexity and differentiated character of kindness. By contrast, approaches which recognise and aim to work with the grain of particular communities – reflecting the experiences, circumstances and preferences of those within them, and focusing on the conditions for kindness – are more likely to succeed.

- Even when kindness is facilitated effectively, it is neither a panacea, nor a replacement for other values or priorities like fairness or justice or efficiency. It should not, therefore, be seen as an alternative to rights based approaches. It can, however, work alongside and complement them, even if there are potential significant tensions, which have been explored in the context of compassion, empathy and justice (Nussbaum, 2001; Pedwell, 2014; Bloom 2016). We will not achieve a fair, just or equal society through a focus on kindness; equally, however, such outcomes will not be realised without a robust infrastructure of kindness as understood here.

- Trying to build a 'kinder Scotland' is not primarily about teaching people skills of 'emotional intelligence' but learning from how people already navigate kindness in everyday life and mitigate its risks. An example of this is the practice of mutuality – the recognition that people find it easier to accept help when they can offer something in return. We return to this last point in section 6.

- Attention to the importance of and conditions for kindness does not require the development of a swathe of entirely new approaches. It does, however, require connections to be made between disparate existing agendas (whether those relate to placemaking, compassionate care or decent work) and a willingness to view kindness as an important, additional – and potentially radical – framing for the discussion of public policy.

- The development of a public policy agenda around kindness will feel uncomfortable in some contexts and should expect to be contested and challenged. Some will feel that it cuts across expectations of standardisation, professionalism or universalism; others that it is an unwelcome
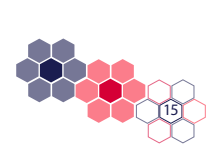
– and perhaps even cynical – distraction in the face of poverty, injustice and inequality, or an attempt to manipulate individuals, employees and communities into taking on additional responsibilities. That contestation and challenge should be recognised and openly debated, rather than avoided. Conscious attempts should be made to explore how kindness can reinforce rather than undermine other progressive values or priorities. Ultimately, however, the charge of cynicism will only be addressed effectively if there is congruence between what organisations say and what they do in relation to kindness.

- How we talk and write about the place of emotions in the context of kindness matters. We need, therefore, to be wary of setting up dualisms between emotions (kindness) and rationality as this could increase anxiety about a 'relational' turn; recognise that we are not all in a position to be kind or to feel positively about experiencing kindness; and that the policy work of kindness is more usefully focused on the social (including organisational) contexts which shape our emotional lives rather than on assumed deficits in individuals' emotional intelligence.
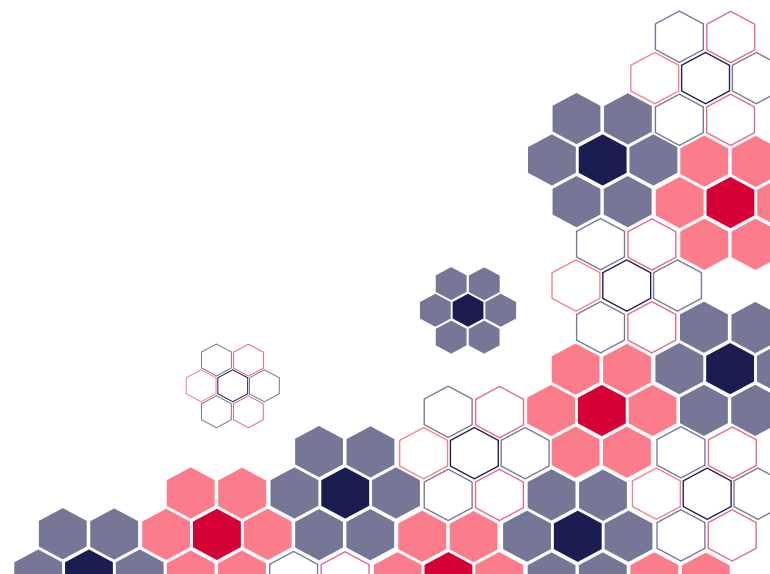
5. Kindness and public policy: three questions and three kinds of activity

If the earlier sections were concerned with the question of 'why kindness', and what it might offer to our thinking about the NPF and public policy more generally, we turn now to the specific issue of *how* public policy might meaningfully contribute to a kinder society – **by which we mean one in which small-scale, mundane acts and relationships of unobligated help and support are collectively valued and are simply more likely to occur.**

Three key (empirical) questions arise here.

- How do people become *aware* of the needs of others, beyond their closest relations of kith and kin and the immediate demands of professional roles?
- What leads people to feel able to *offer* help and support in response to those needs, or stops them from doing so?
- What leads people to feel able to seek or *accept* help and support from others, or stops them from doing so?

For our purposes, the core consideration is then whether and how the state or organisations might reasonably be expected to influence the above processes. There are, broadly, three areas of activity through which public policy – and, in a specifically Scottish context, the NPF – might have a role in doing so. In practice, these are likely to be complicated and overlapping, but we aim to describe them here as straightforwardly as possible, as a first step in delineating what has often tended to be a more abstract debate about the relationship between kindness and public policy.

- The NPF can encourage organisations to help to create and shape (external) communities which are characterised by contingent social interaction and allow for contact across difference, out of which supportive acts and relationships are more likely to emerge.

- It can encourage organisations to focus internally, on the relationships between staff and between staff and external stakeholders (such as users of services), and on what can be done to facilitate small-scale practices of recognition and support that go beyond those tightly prescribed by roles and routines.
- The NPF can tell, and encourage others to tell, stories or narratives about both of the above.
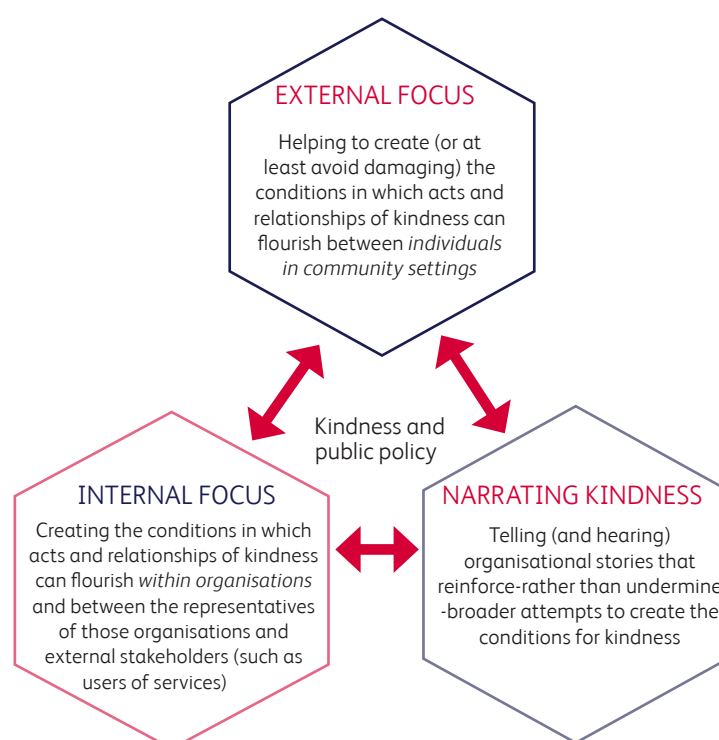
In the following sections, we explore in greater detail what each of these might involve.

6. Creating kinder communities

There is now a considerable body of work which speaks to the challenge of creating kinder communities. Ferguson's (2017) report for the Carnegie UK Trust, for example, directly addresses the question of how kindness and everyday relationships can support the wellbeing of individuals and communities and, in turn, be supported through local initiatives.

But there is also a great deal of wider thinking and activity which is concerned with the question of how 'ordinary relationships' (Brownlie, 2014) can be enabled and encouraged within community settings. For example, many of the themes in this report can be found in the idea of placemaking, which has its roots in the work of Jane Jacobs (1961) and others, and is based on the principle that communities (and especially cities) should be designed for people, with walkable streets, welcoming public spaces, and lively neighbourhoods. Such ideas have been increasingly widely adopted and applied in Scotland in recent years. The work of Architecture and Design Scotland on 'Town Centre Living: A Caring Place' (2018) is one illustration of such an approach and contains many relevant case studies and examples. Although it does not use the language of kindness, its principles are entirely consistent with the promotion of low-level, unstructured, contingent social interaction, out of which productive – and often mutually beneficial – social relationships can develop.

While a focus on creating the conditions for kinder communities does not necessarily involve organisations in doing new things, it does require them to think differently and, as a matter of course, ask questions about the extent to which their actions may contribute to or impede the conditions for contingent and informal social interaction and the web of small-scale supportive acts and relationships that can emerge from that.

The start point here is an assumption that small-scale supportive acts and relationships will often emerge, given the right conditions and

attention to the reasons why people may feel reluctant to take the 'leap of faith' necessary to ask for, offer or accept help or support in the first place. By 'the right conditions', we mean spaces, places and communities in which there is ample scope for contingent social interaction and for people to become aware of (and so potentially respond to) the needs of others. There are many different factors and potential levers at work here – economic, social, cultural and physical – and we return below to the role of governments and organisations in relation to these.

The idea of a leap of faith is central to situations involving risk, trust and uncertainty (Brownlie and Howson, 2005). As we noted earlier, many of the risks involved in kindness are affective ones and relate to the possibility of embarrassment, shame, discomfort, unwanted emotional entanglement, and so on. Those risks cannot be entirely mitigated – any encounter that lies outside the realm of the highly routinised and obligated carries these kind of potential outcomes – but they can be understood and their implications (for service design, planning, community development, etc.) taken into account. Here are some examples of the ways in which that might happen.

- We know from the Liveable Lives research that people find it easiest to offer and accept help when it happens 'by the by' (Anderson, Brownlie and Milne, 2015a; Brownlie and Spandler, 2018) or in informal settings (Ferguson, 2017) – alongside, or as a by-product of, other activity rather than through an explicit or direct focus. That is why a community gardening initiative, a walking group or an informal social gathering will always be more productive of small acts and relationships of everyday kindness than any number of campaigns urging people to practice 'random kindness' or 'look out for a neighbour'.

- We know, too, that people find it easier to accept kindness when they themselves have opportunities to 'give something back'.

That does not necessarily need to involve a relationship of direct reciprocity but can be much more diffuse, involving practical or emotional support given in the past, to be given in the future, or to those other than the person currently offering help. This can also involve a form of mutuality in which both people get something out of the interaction, either at the time or subsequently (for an example of the potential of this in relation to older people, see Bowers et al., 2011). By creating multiple and diverse opportunities for individuals to contribute to their communities – whatever their own needs or circumstances – we not only create the conditions for contingent social interaction but also potentially free them from the feeling of being defined by their need for and acceptance of help. The work of the Centre for Ageing Better on age-friendly and inclusive volunteering (Jopling and Jones, 2018) provides some important pointers here. Similarly, the strand of KIN which explored food sharing showed that when everyone contributes something, however small, the nature of social connection is changed (Ferguson and Thurman, 2019).

- The physical characteristics of residential neighbourhoods – with their shared stairwells, green spaces or high hedges, their prioritisation of the needs of cars over people or vice versa, and so on – are other obvious examples of ways in which public policy and practice can shape the environmental scope for everyday interaction between neighbours or residents. Of course, such thinking also has to be informed by the Scottish Government's wider commitment to addressing climate change and the unavoidable need to link relational, social and ecological infrastructures.

Funding and planning decisions also impact on organisations and initiatives not primarily concerned with the provision of social support but which nevertheless contribute to the development of supportive acts and relationships – for example, the availability of community centres, libraries or other 'third spaces'. It is important that we include here social spaces associated with businesses, such as cafes or pubs. While often dismissed as purely commercialised environments, research suggests it is the very ordinariness of branded cafes and the like that can be reassuring, offering familiarity and a sense of ease (Jones et al., 2015). These are crucial sites of contingent sociality for some people because they do not involve 'threshold crossing' in quite the same way that community centres and even libraries may. That said, they may be subject to other processes of exclusion – not least physical accessibility and affordability. The relocation of a town centre store to a suburban shopping mall can, for example, radically disrupt patterns of contingent social interaction for particular sections of the population (such as older people and those without cars). There are, then, issues here about where services of all kinds are located, but also about how they can be rendered accessible (e.g. through transport policy).

The work of the Carnegie UK Trust through KIN and in North Ayrshire has explored some of these issues in detail and documented various examples of how existing community spaces might be 'activated' or 'unlocked' (see Ferguson and Thurman, p.13). A further example of an initiative in this area comes from the Co-op Foundation's Space to Connect fund, which provides grants to improve community spaces where people can connect and co-operate.[10]

Two further points need to be made here, though, about attempts to facilitate practices of kindness in community settings.

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10   See https://www.coopfoundation.org.uk/funding_support/space-to-connect/ for further details.

First, it would be naïve to assume that, given the right conditions, supportive acts and relationships will always emerge. Recent work on urban heterogeneity has made clear that navigating interdependencies and mutualities is challenging, messy and precarious in the context of racism and other inequalities (Neal et al., 2019). A focus on kindness is not a Pollyanna-ish call to flatten out such tensions, to over claim what is possible at a local level in the context of wider national or global constraints or to deny that place-making is often 'uneasy' but rather to engage with, support and celebrate the small ways that people do achieve everyday solidarities (Back and Shamser, 2016).

Second, the discussion about 'kinder communities' and 'kinder spaces' in recent reports has tended to default to geographically-bounded understandings, especially when teamed with ideas from urban geography such as placemaking. Increasingly, however, our lives are lived in multiple communities, some of which may be highly geographically dispersed and/or exist online, and all of which provide settings in which acts and relationships of kindness are offered and accepted, withheld or refused. As the Liveable Lives study and much other research has shown, for many it is now meaningless to think dualistically about 'online' and 'offline' worlds as interactions and relationships extend across both realms. Some of the harsher aspects of social media discourse, along with anxiety about the potentially 'dehumanising' consequences of emotional algorithms, may contribute to a sense that the online world, in particular, is an unlikely setting for kindness. In practice, however, online spaces are also replete with examples of people offering 'kin-like' help and support to those to whom they owe no immediate or obvious duty of care. Emerging research on the digital economy highlights evidence of both trends (Irani and Six Silberman, 2013; Gray, 2015; Ticona, Mateescu and Rosenblat, 2018).[11] More generally research on the impact of digital technologies on relationships makes clear the need to move beyond vague references to the internet, to examine the specificities of socio-technical context – including social media or social networking sites – the reason for, and frequency of, use and the type of relationships involved (Hookway et al., 2019).

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11   We are grateful to Dr Karen Gregory for her guidance in this area.
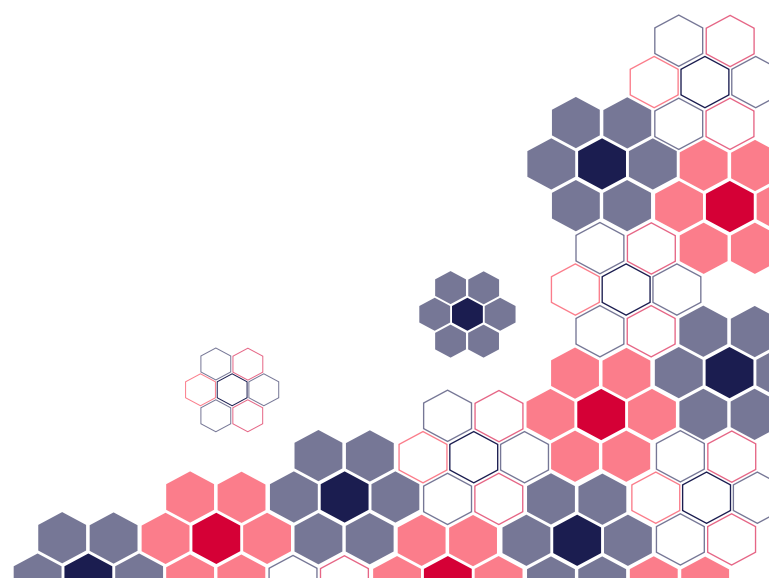
7. Towards the kind(er) organisation

A key question for the Scottish Government and other actors interested in making a reality of the commitment to kindness in the NPF is this: if we are interested in those low-level and largely unscripted moments when individuals go beyond their immediate obligations to respond in humane or kin-like ways to the needs of others, what is the role of the organisation? Can an organisation itself (or its policies) be kind?

We suggest that **the kind organisation is one in which such acts are commonplace, encouraged, facilitated and supported, but not necessarily codified or enforced**. Similarly, a 'kind policy' is one that leaves scope for such acts to occur, rather than one that prescribes them. Two types of relationship are particularly relevant here: those between staff or employees of an organisation, on the one hand, and those between staff/employees and users of services, on the other.

We are not claiming the development of a host of new 'solutions' in either of these areas. Indeed, there are echoes of the 'kind organisation' in various existing debates and developments. These range from research on the 'compassionate organisation' and 'positive organizational scholarship'[12] to attempts to create a discourse of 'decent' or 'good work' that takes account of relational factors such as culture, values, ethics and social and wellbeing policies[13]. There is also a growing focus on the theory and practice of relational, compassionate or collaborative leadership – all conceived as alternatives to traditional hierarchical, instrumental, command and control styles of leadership and management (Chapman, 2018). However, we are suggesting

that the attempt to move from rhetoric to practice in policymaking around kindness would benefit from a greater clarity about the types of activity that might advance such an agenda.

Kindness between staff

The first thing to recognise is that organisations are also social spaces or communities in their own right. They, too, have configurations of physical settings, and social and cultural expectations, that can make it more or less difficult for people to act towards each other in informal, low-level, contingent and supportive ways.

In terms of promoting kindness *between* staff, for example, organisations can make efforts to create the time and space for staff to interact differently. That is not necessarily the same thing as the 'informalisation' of the work space more generally. The language of 'brown bag lunches', team-building and 'sandpits' suggests the creation of new spaces, but these are usually highly instrumental and directly geared towards achieving organisational goals. One of the challenges here – and it is a considerable one – is for organisations to find or create genuinely informal, unstructured and, above all, *non-instrumental* spaces. More generally, organisations need to recognise that decisions about how spaces are allocated and used can have significant implications for the infrastructure of kindness.

From the discussion at the Kindness Sessions, it was clear that there are potential pitfalls in assessing how well organisations are doing in this respect – particularly around what might be considered indicators of a kind organisation. For example, organisations which score highly in staff surveys on 'supportive relationships between staff' might be tempted to congratulate themselves on exhibiting a 'culture of kindness'. However, they may also need to ask *why* staff need to be so mutually supportive and whether, in practice, employees are being

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12   See, for example, Dutton, Workman and Hardin, 2014; Rynes, Bartunek, Dutton and Margolis, 2012; Worline and Dutton, 2017; Simpson and Berti, 2019. There is also a body of research criticising positive organisational scholarship or 'POS' – particularly the regulatory aspects of such initiatives including what happens to those employees who do not wish to be shown compassion or to take part in compassion initiatives (Simpson et al., 2014).

13   See, for example, Taylor (2017). These concerns are increasingly pressing in the context of the gig economy (Ticona, Mateescu and Rosenblat, 2018) but also given the rise of 'screen level bureaucracy' in the public sector (Zacha, 2017).

asked to compensate for wider failures of the organisation. (There are some parallels here with the high levels of mutually supportive behaviour and relationships evident in our most deprived communities, where individuals are forced to look out for each other because of the absence of effective social or economic protection from the state; or with the forms of 'pragmatic mutuality and solidarity evident among low-paid and exploited workers – see Raw and McKie, 2019)[14].

In short, emotional work by employees can come to be regulated or governed in ways that can be exploitative of employees (and those they work with). An agenda around the 'kind organisation' needs to recognise and avoid reinforcing such risks.

Kindness between staff and people using services

The question of how to promote kinder interactions between staff and those who use services is equally complicated, if not more so – not least because the differences in roles and status involved can make it difficult to relate in genuinely 'interpersonal' ways. Moreover, in recent decades, organisational cultures – especially though not only in the public sector – have become increasingly inhibiting of individuals' willingness and ability to go beyond core tasks and easily codifiable job descriptions to acknowledge and respond to the particular practical and emotional needs of those using services.

This can be seen as a product of two related factors: an inevitable focus on 'firefighting' or core business in the context of austerity; and the growth of an audit/risk culture. As a result, the scope to exercise 'relational discretion' has been reduced.

This constricting and tightly defined quality of contemporary organisational cultures often means that small acts and relationships of kindness are experienced as individuals 'stepping outside their role'. This is what the American sociologist, Robert Wuthnow meant when he referred to kindness happening in the 'crevices between institutionalized roles' (1995, p.33). In some respects, this can add to the power and significance of kindness, because the recipients of it understand that such interactions are unobligated and are therefore, in some sense, more meaningful. At the same time, of course, this creates risks. Organisations have less control over what is happening (but not less responsibility for it), while staff may be penalised for acting in ways that are ultimately deemed inconsistent with their role.

At the Kindness Sessions, there was some discussion of the scope to redefine or expand our understanding of organisational roles to include greater degree of discretion in the first place. The goal here would not be to prescribe what staff must do but to describe (and to emphasise) what they may do. There is evidence from the work of the Carnegie UK Trust and others that, in some organisational contexts, staff perceive policies (e.g. about safeguarding or health and safety) to be more restrictive than they actually are. In almost all organisational settings, there is actually great expertise in the appropriate exercise of discretion – often concentrated in more experienced staff including those in public facing 'administrative' roles.[15] Accessing and learning from this 'practice wisdom' is likely to be more effective and attractive to employees than standardised and formal training to improve 'emotional intelligence', though contextualised training can have a place in raising awareness of emotional complexity. Recognising that we all have skills in managing everyday relationships is consistent with the understanding of kindness

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14   Raw and McKie (2019) offer an example of 'pragmatic mutuality' between low-paid women with care responsibilities. By swapping or extending their shifts to cover for each other, these women could be seen as engaging in acts and relationships of everyday kindness as these are rarely based on direct reciprocity, but this can also be understood as having an 'ensnarement effect', further locking women into low-paid jobs.

15   Others have noted – and many will have experienced - the way that the roles of health service administrative staff involve task complexity, discretion and emotional labour and contribute to patient safety and wellbeing. See, for example, https://21stcenturypublicservant.wordpress.com/2019/07/03/dont-ask-me-im-just-an-administrator/.

being outlined in this report as something that is *already* happening between people, if often invisibly.

The exact nature of, and scope for, relational responsiveness and discretion will necessarily vary between settings – for example, between a police station, a social care setting and a school. What links these different local settings, however, is the need to give staff permission to act in 'kind' ways that prioritise individual need and which may even clash with high-level organisational targets. Staff also need support to learn how to deploy discretion competently and fairly as trust in organisations depends on professionals not only acting benignly – that is, have others' interests at heart – but competently (Calnan and Rowe, 2004). Without this support, greater discretion may result not in kindness but in arbitrary, unequal and unfair treatment by those on the frontline which would ultimately be corrosive, rather than facilitative, of trust in organisations.

It is, however, not a case of introducing discretion, as the public sector *already* runs on discretional labour – indeed, as Muers points out, 'front-line decision-making is likely to drive a large part of policy outcomes' rather than nationally imposed standards (2018, p.21). Yet, public sector employees – a group characterised by Lipsky (1980) as 'street level bureaucrats' – often find their discretion or autonomy at best unsupported and at worse, undermined. It is this, Zacha suggests, which leads to staff acting indifferently, with a blinkered approach to rule enforcement or in overly caring ways which can be paternalistic and lead to neglect of others who may be in greater need. He suggests that, to guard against this, employees need not only to be accountable to bureaucratic hierarchies, clients and to their professions but to draw on peer accountability in their day to day work. There is more research needed on how this peer reflection would work in practice.

In thinking about kindness, however, it is clear that the discussion of discretion cannot be separated from issues of trust (and power): organisations need to trust staff to make competent and fair decisions, and staff need to trust their organisations to support them to use discretion appropriately and not to exploit or penalise them when they do.

Other ways of challenging organisational attitudes towards risk – and moving from more transactional to relational approaches to both commissioning and delivering services – have been explored in the work of the Carnegie UK Trust through KIN (especially the 'procurement and commissioning' group) and in North Ayrshire (see Ferguson and Thurman, 2019, p.20-24). In the latter local authority, a Kindness Promise has been developed which, among other things commits the organisation to 'trusting our staff to make meaningful connections with people' and 'ensuring our performance management aligns with our values' (see Ferguson and Thurman, ibid, p.25). A potential barrier to this greater relational discretion within organisational settings is the transactional focus of most procurement processes. In the context of public services which are often delivered by third sector or commercial organisations, competition and contracts are generally oriented around targets and deliverables that sit uncomfortably with subjective and relational constructs such as kindness (although some other relational indicators, such as satisfaction, are widely used) and diffuse value more generally. Trust is also an issue here: as Toby Lowe has argued, there needs to be greater trust between commissioners and service providers before either side will feel able to develop the kind of flexible and relational delivery that is needed in situations of complexity.[16]

Elsewhere in the UK, there have been related developments – such as the Wigan Deal[17] – which, while not using the language of kindness,

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16   See https://www.centreforpublicimpact.org/simple-answers-wrong-toby-lowe-need-new-kind-accountability-public-services/

17   https://www.kingsfund.org.uk/blog/2019/06/wigan-report

explicitly address this need for relational services and greater staff autonomy. Of course, in a Scottish context, this need had already been identified by the Christie Commission, reminding us that the kindness agenda has local policy roots but also that we need to understand both the persistent appeal of such approaches and why it is they become 'stuck' and unrealised.

The above places trust at the heart of discussions about kindness in organisations. Achieving mutual trust is, of course, easier said than done. As studies in other areas have shown, organisational trust can be slow to build but quick to dissipate (Brownlie and Shaw, 2017). Nevertheless, for acts and relationships of kindness to become common – if never entirely predictable – features of organisational life, this permission/trust dynamic needs to be addressed. That will involve a range of relationships and actors – including, potentially, trade unions and others with an interest in questions of role demarcation – and will only be successful if greater relational discretion in organisational policy and practice can be shown to be mutually beneficial for all concerned. This links to our third, and final, area of activity, that of narration.
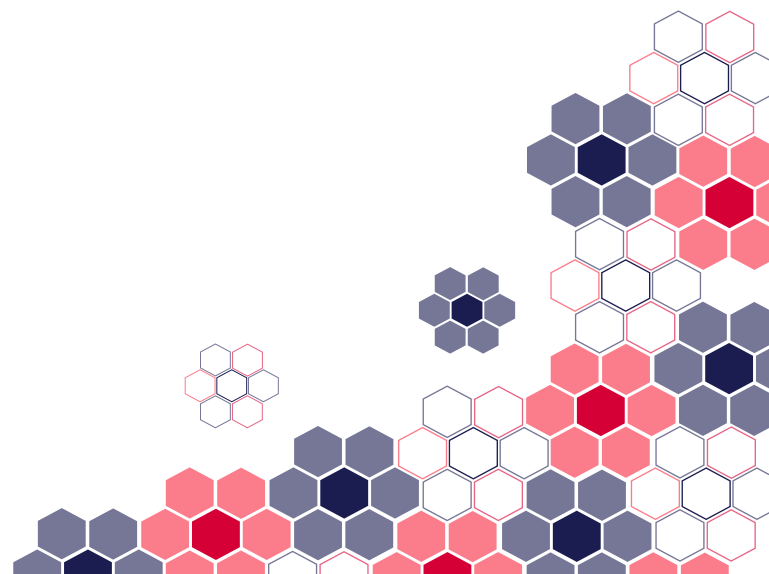
8.   Narrating kindness

Stories help us make sense of the world and our place in it and they enable things to happen or not (McAdams, 1993; Riessman, 2008). While we can never know for certain how any of our actions will be received, because kindness is unobligated and less expected, uncertainty (and therefore risk) can be even greater. In this context, stories or narratives of kindness can help us to anticipate, interpret or understand the reactions of others.

The Liveable Lives research highlighted some of the stories that individuals tell about their willingness and ability (and that of others) to engage in small acts and relationships of kindness. For example, narratives of place can help people to relate to others in particular ways and to manage anxieties about how such interaction might be interpreted – so the notion of Glasgow as a 'friendly city', where people 'go out of their way' to help, gives licence to offer support without being seen as eccentric or threatening. And there are individual narratives – I'm the kind of person who…', 'I was brought up to…', etc. – that can have similar effects. But the study also made clear that narratives can constrain kindness: 'People keep themselves to themselves round here'; 'Glasgow's welcoming as long as you're white and working class'; 'I'm not the kind of person who…'

So narratives matter for individuals and communities, but they also matter to organisations and for public policy. They have real consequences in the present and allow things to happen differently in the future. Narratives about values, like the NPF itself, can be read as having a vision of the future built into them and such value narratives are increasingly important in the public sector (Muers, 2018). This is because narratives are critical to processes of organisational and societal change: transformation usually starts with envisioning and narrating an ideal future state. As in the case of the North Ayrshire Kindness Promise (Ferguson and Thurman, 2019), such narratives can be used to convey a vision, signal what is

important, and encourage particular behaviours or outcomes. For all these reasons, organisations and public policy actors should be interested in narratives of kindness.

Narratives are, however, complicated. A variety of narratives can work at different levels at the same time, and the same narrative can be used to different ends. Narratives can be in competition with each other and, once out of the bottle, can be difficult to control. They are never fixed, rarely definitive and are usually open to contestation and change. Organisational stories, then, like any stories, are debatable and dynamic. But while no organisation can completely control how its stories are heard, it can be more deliberate about what it chooses to say, and about the stories it chooses to hear.

The NPF and a 'national' narrative of kindness

The narrative of Scotland as a 'kind nation' is both relatively new and part of a much older story. The explicit recognition of kindness in the values statement in the NPF is clearly new – and, as we argued earlier, reflects a growing concern to see relational values at the heart of government and public policy, in contrast to the more paternalistic and instrumental language of the traditional welfare state.

But the idea that Scotland sees itself as a country that has a particular concern to tackle inequality or injustice has deeper roots. Elements of that story can be traced back to the Enlightenment, but it has been told more frequently and loudly in the decades since the Thatcher government came to power in Westminster. In other words, it has been to some extent an oppositional story – a story about who 'we' in Scotland are not. Whatever its origins and distinctiveness, the NPF offers an overarching narrative about the significance of kindness in Scotland that organisations can potentially use to frame, justify or amplify their own, more local narratives.

A clear message from the discussions at the Kindness Sessions was that the NPF is not a single entity: having started life as a performance framework, it has evolved into more of a 'visioning statement'. If the intention is to shift further from the former to the latter, it will need to be elaborated and actively narrated. In particular, because there are only limited references to kindness in the NPF itself, the exact meaning of its kindness narrative is contestable.

The NPF could be read, for example, as simply encouraging individuals to engage in acts of small kindnesses – for example, towards neighbours or people who are vulnerable and living on their own. The 'scaling up' of these individual acts is then one way in which Scotland as a kind nation might be constituted – as in this recent St Andrew's Day message by Scotland's First Minister, Nicola Sturgeon.

> *The values of compassion and solidarity are central to the story of St Andrew. They are also a big part of Scotland's national identity. So we're encouraging everyone to celebrate these values, by performing an act of kindness on St Andrew's Day. That could mean helping out your neighbours; giving time or money to charity; or simply offering friendship and company to those who need it most. It's a great way of marking this special day – and of making life a little bit brighter for our friends and neighbours.*[18]

While the notion of solidarity is invoked here, this version of kindness could also be seen as emphasising individual morality and decision-making and, hence, as being socially and politically conservative. Indeed, it is not difficult to find examples of similar exhortations from politicians with apparently very different political orientations. The following passage, for example, comes from a speech by George Bush. The America he is envisaging is, of course, one with a

relatively limited role for the state and a greater reliance on family, voluntary organisations and local community – themes which could also be seen in the conservative communitarianism of the Big Society agenda of the coalition government in the UK between 2010 and 2015.

> *We're a nation where somebody walks across the street and says to a neighbor who's shut in, "What can I do to make your day brighter? How can I help you?" That's the America I know.*[19]

There are certainly already those who caution against "a political agenda which promotes certain forms of sociality, full of emotional sentiment but perhaps stripped of political radicalism" (Jupp, Pykett and Smith, 2016). But the NPF *could* also be seen as invoking a version of kindness that is more explicitly aligned with notions of fairness, equality or justice – i.e. that recognises that some people's needs are greater because of the structural disadvantages they face, and envisions kindness as part of a deliberate (and crucially, *collective and state enabled*) response to such inequality. This would see kindness as a response which involves recognising the needs of those who are not necessarily (or obviously) kin-like.

This second version of kindness (and of the kind nation) would start from a different place from the individualised, scaling-up version, and to an extent from framings of compassion which understand compassion as rooted in a capacity to identify with another's position and to see their suffering as meriting or deserving our attention (Nussbaum, 2001). This more radical version would not *require a sense of identification* – of others being like us – or of others being deserving as its start point, but rather begins with the idea of working with or across differences.[20]

18   https://www.gov.scot/publications/st-andrews-day-message/

19   https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2002/03/text/20020308-5.html

20   In practice, experience of austerity, racism and other forms of exclusion may leave some feeling unsafe to seek support beyond those they do identify with (see Anderson, Brownlie and Milne, 2015a), hence the impossibility of disentangling values of kindness from those of justice.

Participants at the Kindness Sessions offered a range of insights into the current and potential narrative of kindness associated with the NPF.

- There was a call for that narrative to be accompanied by concrete examples from public services – in short, not just to say but to show what the 'kind(er) organisation' might look like in practice. We can see examples of what this might start to look like in the North Ayrshire work, but also the application of the Buurtzorg model of neighbourhood care (originally in the Netherlands and now in Scotland and elsewhere[21]) and the profound rethinking of local government services involved in the Wigan Deal.

- It was felt that further narration of kindness in the context of the NPF might also involve unpacking its relationship to other aspects of the national narrative – for example, demonstrating that, rather than being something separate from, or potentially in tension with, the pursuit of economic growth, kindness already contributes to such growth. This is a theme we return to in the conclusion.

- Some participants felt that the kindness narrative in the NPF might in fact help to reinvigorate other aspects of the national narrative about public services that could be perceived as having become stuck – notably, the arguments for prevention and early intervention that grew out of the Christie Commission (Christie, 2011).

- Running through the above discussions about what the NPF is for was the related question of whom the NPF is aimed at, given that it has an audience and stakeholders beyond its immediate 'readership'.

Specifically, it was felt that the 'warm words' of the NPF might be dismissed as irrelevant by those in greatest need and by those who work with them. At the same time, however, an important potential use of a national narrative about values was also acknowledged within the discussion at the Kindness Sessions: the possibility of it being used to hold those in power to account

Narrating the kind organisation

What would it mean to develop narratives of kindness at the level of the individual organisation?

One of the challenges here would be to develop narratives that might help counter concerns or anxieties about prioritising kindness – for example, the idea that kindness is incompatible with difficult environments, tough decisions and outcomes that are unfavourable for particular individuals (such as the refusal of benefits or imposition of a sentence[22]); or that kindness is inevitably in tension with professionalism[23].

It was suggested at the Kindness Sessions that one of the less direct ways that an organisation can signal that it is comfortable with the relational, even in contexts where instrumental considerations appear to be central, is to prioritise relational skills and capacities in decisions about recruitment, training and advancement – and to develop narratives to support that emphasis. Narratives can also help to normalise kindness – both in the sense of signalling that it is acceptable, indeed encouraged, to be kind in organisational settings, but also recognising that acts of kindness are often mundane rather than exceptional.

Those leading organisations need not only to develop their own compelling and convincing

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21   See https://theknowledgeexchangeblog.com/2017/07/05/buurtzorg-reinventing-district-nursing-in-scotland/

22   See http://www.journalonline.co.uk/Magazine/64-2/1026886.aspx#.XWVDMzZKiUk for just such a narrative in the context of the criminal justice system.

23   In Scotland, a possible example of such a narrative comes from the Care Inspectorate, which is currently developing a resource which includes practice examples that challenge prevailing attitudes around risk, regulation and what it means to be professional.
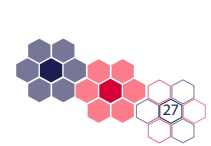
narratives of kindness but to listen to those of others – such as the stories of staff, service users or other stakeholders. And there is a need to give space not just to stories of kindness but of unkindness, or what can make it difficult to be kind. Organisations sometimes encourage staff to share accounts of 'how they have lived up to their values this week'. Also needed, however, are accounts of 'what stopped us from living up to our values' as a way of highlighting the more structural impediments to organisational change. Organisational orientations towards risk are an example of this (see Ferguson and Thurman, ibid, pp. 26-7).

Some specific points were raised at the Kindness Sessions about what makes narratives of kindness effective within organisational settings:

- When we talk about narratives of kindness, it is important to emphasise that this is not the invention of a new doctrine: these are stories that build on what happens anyway. Again, the 'groundedness' of these narratives – the fact that they are recognisable to people in their everyday comings and goings in the workplace – is what gives these accounts their purchase/their power. Organisational narratives of kindness are made compelling by linking them to individual or interpersonal stories – whether those relate to the experience of the chief executive, the most junior member of staff or a user of services.

- It is one thing for an organisation (or a country) to proclaim kindness as a core value, but quite another for individuals to feel that their *experience* is actually consistent with that narrative. We are all familiar – as users of services, employees and citizens – with the 'affective dissonance' that can result from a gap between such claims and reality. An example here would be senior management using the language of kindness without demonstrating a tangible concern for or engagement with staff workloads and

stress. In this, as in so many other areas, organisations need to both talk the talk and walk the walk.
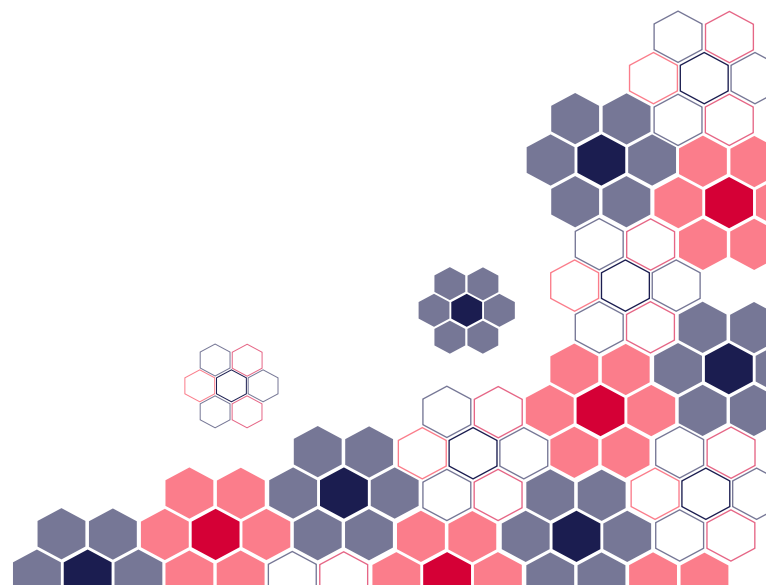
9. Killing the golden goose? On measuring kindness

How would we know if we had successfully created a kinder Scotland? The question of measurement cannot be ducked here – especially in the context of the NPF, the origins of which lie in the attempt to identify outcomes and indicators of progress towards the national vision for wellbeing. And it is especially important *because* performance management – and wider policies of efficiency that restrict resources and flexibility – might be seen as one of the main reasons that kindness has been squeezed out of frontline public services.

But, if we were to try to measure kindness, would we endanger the very thing we are trying to promote? Would it be a case of seizing the spinning top to see how it works? Does quantification of these behaviours and relationships necessarily instrumentalise them and strip away the features that render them 'kind' in the first place?

The first thing to say is that the measurement of prosocial behaviours, attitudes and relationships is not inherently problematic. The potential difficulty comes from attempts to create simplistic measures of kindness or targets which may distort organisational or individual behaviours and compromise some of the core characteristics of kindness (e.g. its voluntaristic nature).

Ultimately, we need to *understand* more about – and not only measure – all aspects of prosocial behaviours and relationships. That will require a multidimensional look at what people think and feel about helping others (or being helped), at what they actually do, in what circumstances and in relation to whom. That agenda will not be greatly advanced by reducing this complex area to a handful of national indicators of kindness or setting targets for a kinder Scotland. It *would*

be advanced by combining qualitative and quantitative indicators in a multi-dimensional, multi-perspective approach, and by paying as much attention to the complexity, dynamics and patterning of prosocial behaviour as to antisocial behaviour.[24] The latter is perhaps the best example of the 'problem orientation' of much public policy and social scientific endeavour – an orientation that needs to be flipped if we are genuinely to advance our understanding of what our previous qualitative work for JRF showed to be a hugely complex issue.

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24   Echoes of this perspective can be found in the work of Nesta on measuring public value. See, for example, Geoff Mulgan's blog on this theme in which he suggests that "instead of focusing on the search for single numbers it's better to map, measure and explore" - https://apolitical.co/solution_article/how-do-you-measure-the-good-life-nesta-offers-an-answer/

10. Conclusion: the value of kindness and kindness as a value

Although kindness might seem a relatively straightforward, hard-to-disagree with or even anodyne concept, as this report has shown, it is actually a complex and socially significant idea, replete with possibilities, risks and ambivalences. While we can choose to default to a simplistic or unexamined understanding of kindness, we should acknowledge that as a choice and recognise that much of the potential to use the concept to achieve meaningful, practical and even radical change may be lost.

We have suggested instead that the effective deployment of the concept in relation to policymaking in general and the NPF in particular requires a conscious articulation of what we mean by kindness and of its relationship to other ideas.

To that end, we have proposed an understanding that anchors it in small-scale and everyday practices, treats it as emotionally complex, as inherently social and essentially unobligated. When we talk about kindness, then, we are not just referring to an abstract value or individual character trait. We propose that the term should instead also denote something much more concrete: *namely, what people do for one another, in response to moments of perceived need, when there is the option to do nothing.*

Despite this start point in social practices – in the mundane aspects of what people *do* – these apparently simple acts carry huge practical, emotional and symbolic significance. This is about more than the capacity of kindness to 'make someone's day' or add a relational gloss to what can otherwise seem like a wearily transactional world. For all of us, acts and relationships of everyday kindness literally make life 'liveable', in the sense of not just bearable but *possible*. Imagine the practicalities of your own life completely shorn of such ad hoc support and recognition, and the role that these plays in

your workplace or community, and in the wider economy.

Implicit in this is the notion of *public value* – a concept that can be understood as encompassing 'outcomes, institutions and services that are valued by the public but not easy to count in the way that the monetary value of cars or computers can be' (Mulgan et al., 2019, p.4).

Our use of the term 'the infrastructure of kindness', then, is partly an attempt to call attention to the fact that these myriad small acts and relationships have a societal or public value – or are a form of 'value creation' – that should be recognised (Kattel and Mazzucato, 2018; Mazzucato, 2018). But kindness also has infrastructural dimensions in the sense that it is dependent on social infrastructures of various kinds – on public spaces and third places, on informal associations and organisations, on libraries, pubs, cafes and garden fences, within and across which people have opportunities to become aware of and respond to the needs of others.

This talk of public value and social infrastructures carries a degree of risk that some of the most emotionally significant aspects of social life are reduced to aspects of system maintenance or indirect wealth creation. While kindness *has* a value in that sense, it also *is* a value – in the sense of a collective judgement about what is important or should be prioritised. The inclusion of kindness as a core value within the NPF may partly reflect considerations of public value as identified above, but it also carries assumptions about what constitutes a 'good society' and, as such, cannot be separated from questions of morality and politics. In short, we should attend to the infrastructure of kindness not just because it greases the cogs of markets and other systems, but because it offers a more solidaristic and humane vision of who we are and might be.

We are not suggesting here that the pursuit of kindness should, therefore, become the overriding or organising principle for public policy in

Scotland, nor that it involves the development of entirely new methods and approaches. There is much to draw on in existing theory and practice – whether that relates to notions of placemaking, good work, compassion or community work. We do think, however, that the idea of kindness is one that has something important to add to those existing debates, concepts and practices, and is a theme that can usefully connect – and render accessible – some of the existing attempts to foreground the relational aspects of policy and practice.

To return to the particular understanding of kindness that we have outlined here, it has both ordinary and *extraordinary* characteristics, is both prosaic *and* potentially radical, is rooted in individual interactions *and* is deeply social. There should be no need to apologise, then, for the development of a public policy agenda in this area – one which is about recognising, accessing and unleashing the (possibly radical and transformative) potential of ordinary relationships of everyday help and support. That, however, should not be taken to imply the transfer of responsibility from the state to individuals or communities; nor that kindness can be separated from considerations of justice, fairness and equality – although both those 'versions' of kindness are also available. Nor should it be used to colonise our relationships to meet the interests of organisations or profit.

The version we are arguing for here – and which, though potentially implicit in the NPF and wider policy debate in Scotland, needs to be actively narrated – acknowledges that such relationships can only flourish in the right conditions and that key structural factors, such as poverty, racism or poor housing, are inimical to such conditions. But public policy also needs to attend to the more immediate preconditions for the infrastructure of kindness. We have suggested that it can do that in three main ways. The first is by creating (or at least avoiding damaging) spaces, places and opportunities in communities within which people can connect, often across difference,

become aware of the needs of others, and feel able to ask for, offer or accept help. The second is to pay greater attention to the relationships within organisational boundaries, both between staff and between staff and other stakeholders (such as people who use services). Key strategies here include the creation of opportunities for unstructured and non-instrumental interaction, and the pursuit of greater relational discretion within professional roles – albeit with an eye to the potential unevenness that may result. Finally, we suggested that governments and other organisational actors can use narratives of kindness (at various levels) to enable people to feel more able and willing to take the necessary affective or relational 'leaps of faith'. Critically, however, those narratives need to be, and to feel consistent with, people's wider experience of the organisation in question. In short, we do not create kinder organisations or communities *simply* by narrating them.

In deciding whose needs to recognise and respond to – whether to be kind or not – we are doing something both simple and fundamental: we are drawing boundaries of 'kin' or 'kin-like' recognition. We are including and, by definition, excluding. While we tend to have clearly defined roles and expectations in relation to some people (such as our family, close friends or professional clients), there is an almost infinite pool of wider human need. As individuals (and even as societies), we cannot respond to all of it. Acts of kindness are those moments in our everyday lives when we choose – in small-scale and fleeting ways – to draw our boundaries a little wider. In the context of global and more local developments that threaten to do the opposite, to reinforce the lines between 'them' and 'us', such moments – and the encouragement and support of them through public policy and other forms of collective action – are part of an increasingly necessary and radical endeavour.

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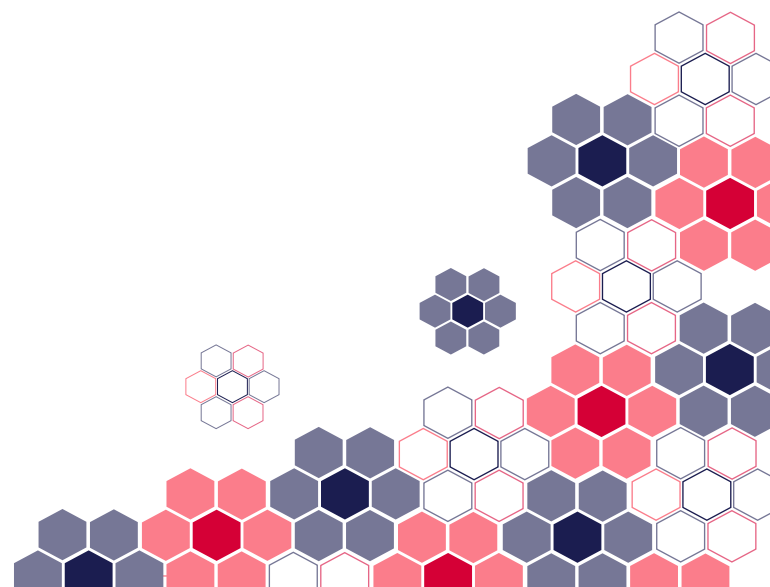
Appendix 1: List of participants in one or more of the Kindness Sessions

Anna Fowlie, Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations

Anja-Maaike Green, Scottish Government

Ben Cavanagh, Scottish Government

Carol Goodman, NHS Scotland

Chris Creegan, Scottish Commission for Learning Disability

Dave Caesar, Scottish Government and NHS Scotland

Duncan Campbell, EY

Fiona Cameron, Criminal Justice Scotland

Gael Cochrane, Criminal Justice Scotland

Harriet Harris, University of Edinburgh

Jennifer Wallace, Carnegie UK Trust

Laura Turney, Scottish Government

Lesley Morrison, University of Edinburgh

Lesley Thomson, Scottish Government

Martin Johnstone, Church of Scotland

Michelle Miller, Chair of Scottish Children's Reporter Administration Board and Member of Scottish Police Authority Board

Monica Merson, NHS Scotland

Nick Young, Start Scotland

Pete White, Positive Prison

Sean Bell, Edinburgh City Council

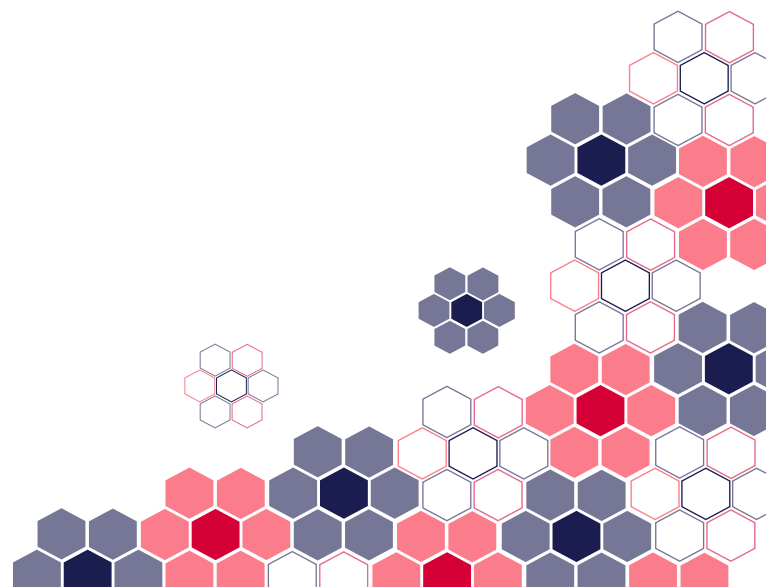Steven Malone, Architecture and Design Scotland

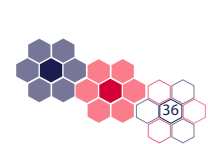Zoe Ferguson, Carnegie UK Trust

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Facilitator

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